Report on

COMMUNITY COUNCILS WORKSHOP

"THE DISTRICT COUNCIL'S ROLE IN THE PRESERVATION OF HUMAN VALUES"

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United Community Funds and Councils

and

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Report by

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and

Clinton Hill Neighborhood Council Delegates

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Mrs. Mildred Helms, Vice-President
Rev. Stanley J. Hallett, Vice-President
Mrs. Emma Pitts, Chairman, Chadwick Ave. Branch
Mrs. Helen Winters, Chairman, Block Building Committee
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"THE DISTRICT COUNCIL'S ROLE IN THE PRESERVATION OF HUMAN VALUES"

Healthy Local Autonomy

"The Community Council idea represents a healthy tendency toward increased local autonomy and citizens participation in decision making . . . Enlightened vigorous citizens' action is the main hope for the preservation of human values in the physical rebuilding of our cities. At first, Cleveland city officials feared a citizens' revolt but now a good working relationship has been developed with both working together for constructive purposes. Enthusiasm, youth and united strength are the great assets of Community Councils." These statements were made by keynote speaker John A. Greene, for the Community Council Workshop in Columbus, Ohio. Mr. Greene is President, United Community Funds and Councils and Chairman of Ohio Bell Telephone Company.

No Neighborhood Is An Island

"No neighborhood is an island and the notion that the tax dollar and a phone call to city hall will prevent blight is totally false" said Thomas A. Gaudette of Chicago's Chatham-Avalon Park Community Council. He said, "frequently one finds neither money, manpower nor courage in city government. Only total mobilization of community opinion will get results."

Preserving Neighborhood Standards Are Essential

Frank Sulewski of the Association of Community Councils of Metropolitan Chicago said "preserving neighborhood standards are essential." He cited the South Side Forum which was organized in one community to fight the operation of an offending city dump a mile away. Eventually the Forum set up a "property value maintenance committee" which hired legal council to prosecute violation of zoning and housing codes until the violations lessened.

The Forum's current objectives are:

1. To preserve the desirable residential nature of the community.

2. To preserve neighborhood standards against pressures of expediency.

3. To demonstrate that racial and religious composition of a community does not matter if agreed standards are maintained.

Stimulating and Exciting Experience

The foregoing quotes tell why all the Newarkers who attended the Workshop came back so enthusiastic. They had an exciting and stimulating experience. They learned new techniques and original ideas from the 350 delegates from all sections of the United States. It provided them with the opportunity to measure the work of the Newark Councils against those of other cities and Newark measured up favorably by comparison.

Cleveland, Ohio

Cleveland has had a rapid expansion in developing district councils. It has 12 councils serving 45% of the city with a staff of 8 professional workers. Cost per council, paid for by the Welfare Federation, is approximately $10,000 yearly. At first the social agencies were not at ease but frequent meetings between council and agency leaders proved mutually helpful. Part of the vitality of these groups comes from working on problems of immediate concern such as tavern location, proper code enforcement, police protection, zoning variances and building conservation and rehabilitation.

Cleveland has 60 Street Clubs. They are comparable to Clinton Hill's Block Branches. Zoning problems are sometimes settled in court by volunteer resident attorneys of the area involved.

In sections of Cleveland it was sometimes found that a home owner could not do the required work to correct trouble spots due to physical disability or financial need. A group of neighbors would then set up a "pool" to take care of the problem.

Paid Professional Staff

In answering the question "What makes some Councils succeed where others die?" Mrs. Muriel Andrews, Secretary, Detroit Federation of Community Councils said, "One important factor was professional staff workers at the local community level. The paid worker provides the organizational insurance that council policies will be carried out."

"What guarantee is there that the paid worker will act as a supporter and executor of council policy, and not its initiator?" asked Mrs. Owens, President of the Associated Community Councils of Newark. Mr. James Vilimas of the Chatham-Avalon Park Council answered that the work of the paid staff member could be so laid out that it would not infringe upon policy-making areas. "In many instances, 'he said, 'a full-time staff is essential to help transform the prevailing state of organized apathy into purposeful area and city-wide action."

Block Branches

Some delegates from Chicago spoke disparagingly about block organizations, saying "They are more often concerned with green grass and tea parties on their own streets than about overcrowding and creeping slums a few blocks away."

Their value was defended by Stanley B. Winters, Clinton Hill Neighborhood Council called them "a training ground for alert, united community action on a basic level, and a common meeting ground for persons who normally might not even nod to each other." He declared that block branches in Clinton Hill were being formed by Council members as an integral part of the overall neighborhood council. He said many of the Chicago "block clubs" existed before the parent council was formed and, hence, were frequently self-centered, suspicious of coordinated area-wide activities and even refused to affiliate with the community council.

Informal Discussions

Informal discussion carried on with persons from other cities throughout the Workshop was especially important. It gave a sense of shared enthusiasm, and imparted an awareness that there are difficult problems for which solutions have not yet been found. Neighborhoods do not remain static. They change constantly and leave much work to be done. It was good to learn from other delegates that all over America people interested in bettering human relations are doing something about it. One long-lasting effect of the conference may come from addresses exchanged with other delegates which will lead to a trans-continental swapping of techniques and news items.

Community Councils

The role of Community Councils in the rehabilitation of neighborhoods is tremendously important. The slum clearance program in Urban Renewal may create slums in surrounding areas unless there is coordinated action to conserve and rehabilitate them.

Planning for an area should be done with the people who have to live with the changes. Community Councils are the ideal organizations for the people of an area to work through. An important phase of the work of a Community Council is in supporting the enforcement of all city codes pertaining to housing, health, sanitation, plumbing, and zoning.

Workshops

There were six workshops running concurrently for about five hours each. They covered organizational aspects, identifying local needs, developing citizen participation and understanding, dealing with community problems, teamwork with city-wide agencies, and the community council role in metropolitan planning.

The Newark delegation arranged to cover several of the workshops. Highlights of these reports follow:

Organizational Aspects Of Districts Councils-Mrs. R. Neal Owens

Biggest problems were organizational, how to organize and communication between neighborhoods.

Councils should work closely with the Police and Fire Captain in their area. When new people move in their area, welcome them and help them to rise to the standards of the community. Develop leadership from the community. Conduct training institutes. Get a real cross section of the community as members of the council, get people of different backgrounds in the council.

Do not try to solve all the problems of the community immediately. Think of all the needs but start on small projects that can be completed. "THINK BIG, PLAN SMALL". Do not spread yourself too thin. Plan for continuity of structure and committee work. Plan to utilize every resource in the community. On city wide provlems plan joint action with other councils.

Develop communication between councils, government agencies, private social agencies, community groups and individuals. Develop a "DO IT YOURSELF" attitude. Do not depend on city hall or others. Always strive for something better.

Mr. Stanley B. Winters attended the same workshop, he reported:

About 35 persons in this panel workshop tackled some basic problems of organization and leadership. In addition to the felt need for full-time, paid leadership, many spoke on breadth and depth in membership-at-large.

To be truly effective, a council must draw uponthe talents, insights, and support of residents from every economic, social, and cultural level. Participation should be consciously sought after through personal visits, invitations to serve in various capacities, and repeated correspondence. One Chicago delegate cited a recent movement in a town in New York State, where tenants were protesting rent increases made in the face of declining building maintenance and services. Hundreds of tenants, led by a Catholic priest and a Presbyterian minister, according to this delegate, refused to pay the increase and won a roll-back to original rentals. Not law but united public pressure brought results there, the delegate concluded. "Constant upgrading of new leadership is vital to councils, others mentioned. Newcomers should be promptly welcomed into responsible posts commensurate with their interests and abilities. Never should the impression be created that a small clique is running the council. This will prevent a few persons from becoming overwhelmed with duties. It will guarantee continued growth and ongoing leadership."

How Do District Councils 'Team Up' With City-Wide Planning And Administrative Groups?-Rev. Stanley J. Hallet.

Illustrating the problem of communication between people, this group got off to a slow start because there was confusion as to the difference between WELFARE COUNCIL and COMMUNITY COUNCIL.

The major discussion centered on how a community council can interpret the long-range capital improvement budget of the city. In Philadelphia a CITIZENS' HOUSING AND PLANNING COUNCIL takes the city's capital improvement budget, breaks it down for the different areas of the city, then sends the budgets to the local community councils. Discussion and debate follow. Residents think through the needs of their area and make recommendations. Rev. Hallett wrote, "One of the major values for me was the stimulation the workshop provided to step back and take a long look at what we are doing. It is helpful to put the work in Newark in the larger perspective of development in other cities."

Urban Renewal And How To Build Citizens' Participation- Mrs. Mildred Holms.

Find out if the neighborhood is for or against urban renewal. The business leadership of the community should be involved. The "HUMAN ELEMENT" must not be neglected. The procedure of relocating individuals and business must be carefully planned and carried out in a humane way.

Land-usage should be evaluated for maximum benefit to the community. The area under consideration must be subjected to a house-to-house inspection. Houses that can be rehabilitated or conserved should not be demolished.

Zoning may have to be upgraded because of the planned improvements. Block leadership must be "sold" on Urban renewal. Residents who keep up their property should be publicly recognized. Persons who cannot keep up their property because of sickness or age should be helped by the community.

How Do District Councils Deal With Their Community Problems? - Mr. Charles Landever.

Be earnest, enthusiastic and willing to work hard for your objectives. Get all the facts about a problem. Make your decisions based on these facts; then act with determination.

Publicize your needs and successes.

Don't be easily discouraged. Analyze your failures. Obstacles can be overcome. Appoint persons to represent the community council point of view who are best equipped to do so.

Tact will help put your point across.

Mrs. Charles Landever also attended the above workshop.

Every community seems to be suffering from similar ailments. People from St. Louis, Cleveland, Chicago, Philadelphia, Louisville, talked about the same problems that confront Newark. Changing neighborhoods, real estate tactics, police protection, zoning and sanitation were most commonly discussed. Cleveland was reported as doing a fine job. It has organized "Street Clubs" similar to our Block Branches. St. Louis is celebrating its 25th anniversary of community councils.

Mrs. Emma Pitts wrote her general impressions of the conference.

Many people do not know the codes governing housing, plumbing, zoning and sanitation. These codes and how they are enforced should be called to the attention of all.

Residents should see that trouble spots are eliminated, and stay together until the trouble is cleared up.

It cannot be stressed too much that community councils are non-political, non-sectarian and non-racial. They exist only to promote the well-being of the people, their children, homes and neighborhoods.